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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 9, 1938.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "HOME SEWING NEWS NOTES." Information from the Office of Experiment Stations and the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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The heyday of the home dressmaker appears to be at hand. At least that's what I infer from some of the predictions made at the recent outlook conference in Washington. You've probably heard about these annual conferences where home management specialists from your State and all the other States gather with Department-of-Agriculture economists to discuss what the coming year may bring forth for farm family living. Your State specialists attend these meetings to learn how they can help you and other farm homemakers make the best possible household budget for the new year.

And that's where the home dressmaker comes in. Of course, farm housewives always have done a good deal of economizing with their needles. But during 1939 home sewing is likely to be more of an economy than it has been during 1938. You see, it looks as if readymade clothes would rise in price while yard goods--some yard goods anyway--would remain about the same. When readymade garments have relatively higher prices than cloth, then, of course, making clothes at home is more of a saving--the home dressmaker really comes into her own.

So, listeners, maybe you'll be wise to start fixing up a nice bright corner in your home as a sewing workshop. Choose a corner with a window that lets in plenty of light and see that you also have a lamp that gives good light for close work. Maybe the man of the house will put up shelves to hold patterns, needles and pins, thread, scissors, iron and other pressing equipment. Maybe he'll also oil and fix up the old sewing machine and hang your long mirror beside the window so you can see how your clothes fit as you make them. But there. There's no use of my going into details about a convenient sewing corner when the home demonstration agent in your county or your State clothing specialist can give you all the suggestions you need.

Instead I'm going to report a little home sewing news from 3 States which throws considerable light on the problem of whether to sew or to buy clothes.

When May Cowles visited 105 farm homes in Wisconsin to learn about clothing expenditures, she found that homemade clothing didn't have a very important place in most families' wardrobes. The women in these homes gave 3 reasons for not doing more sewing. Some said they didn't know how; others said they had no sewing machine still others said: "Why bother to sew when readymade clothes are so cheap?" (That was a year when garment prices were low.) But Miss Cowles did find many of the larger families making and altering clothes. Families of 7 or more wore a good deal of homemade clothing. These families usually needed to economize more than the smaller families and also had older girls at home who could do the sewing. All the Wisconsin families said it was easier to economize by making clothes for the



women and girls than for the men and boys. The large majority of children, especially girls under 12, wore homemade clothes, some made from old garments handed down from older members, and some from flour sacks.

Over in New York State Beulah Blackmore discussed the pros and cons of dressmaking at home with the farm housewives in one county. She talked to 172 women who preferred to buy readymade clothes and 175 who preferred to make their own. Over half of those who bought readymade clothes said they did so to save time. Other said they couldn't sew or didn't like sewing. Still others thought readymade clothes had more style. As for the women who made clothes for themselves and their families, they had just as many arguments on the other side. Economy was their chief argument--the amount they could save by making rather than buying clothes. They also said they could get clothes of better fit, workmanship and material if they made them themselves. All but 3 of these New York farm wives who did their own sewing owned sewing machines.

From Mississippi, Dorothy Dickens gives another slant to the homesewing picture. She found that families who owned their farms did the most home sewing--both white and Negro families. But though more white housewives had sewing machines than Negro, the wives of Negro farm owners did the most sewing, probably because they had less money to spend for clothes. These women were more likely to be better educated and more ambitious than Negro tenants' wives. On the whole, tenant families, whether white or Negro, were more likely to buy what clothes they had, probably because they were not trained in sewing or lacked the equipment to do a satisfactory job. Miss Dickens found plenty of them with time on their hands that might well have gone into making the much-needed clothes they couldn't afford to buy.

In Mississippi the garments most frequently made in farm homes were cotton dresses, slips, petticoats, aprons, smocks, gowns and pajamas. But a good many wives of white farm owners also made shirts, blouses and even underwear for the men and boys in the family.

These glimpses from 3 States suggest several questions that any homemaker may well ask before deciding between home sewing and buying readymades. First, can you sew well enough to make satisfactory clothes? Second, have you the right equipment to do a good job? Third, what articles will you make most successfully? Fourth, could you make more money than you save by sewing if you used the time in other ways? And last but not least, how are the relative prices of readymade garments and yard goods?

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